



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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CONVERSAZIONE

At 8 p.m., THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF ABERDEEN in the chair.

THE EARL OF ABERDEEN, in introducing the REV. DR. HUNTER, of King's Weigh House Church, London, spoke of the growing interest in the P.N.E.U., and strongly advised everyone to belong to it.

DR. HUNTER then delivered an address* on

THE TRAINING OF THE CITIZEN.

The Training of the Citizen is the most vital problem of public life. The hope of the future is in the boys and girls who fill our streets, and in the practical help given them by home, school, college, community, and church. In 20 years they will be England, and it is for us to help to make them what England ought to be, a much fairer and nobler nation than it is to-day. By sins of omission and commission we may easily rob them of blessings which they ought to possess and afflict them with burdens which ought to be now borne and removed. There is a thought in the dim background of many minds that over-population is the great obstacle to social progress, and that the reduction of the population is the great cure of our social woes. Against all ill-considered, improvident, individualistic, selfish marriages protest too clear and strong cannot be made. Yet we need not be so faithless, foolish, and pessimistic as to believe that there are too many boys and girls in the streets and too many people in the world. Numbers do not necessarily mean poverty and misery. The youthful life of our streets is the necessary condition and potential cause of progress, stimulating action and industry, self-denial and sympathy, and when society gets more humanly organised, policies and practices will be shaped and followed that will give to all the people fair and reasonable chances of a comfortable existence. Children are their own justification. There is a kind of child-hatred which I will not describe, but which is as bad as infanticide, and identical with it, and which will bring weakness, stagnation, and degeneracy to the nation that is cursed by it. It is never the quantity of the population, but its quality, that ought to be our supreme concern. The true patriot, like the true

*[We are only able to print an outline of this address.—ED.]

Christian, does not fear the streets crowded with boys and girls. What he fears is their want of training, insufficient or careless, selfish, unsocial, immoral, irreligious training. It is as the earliest school of the citizen that the home is most important. There are the beginnings of all true worth to one's fellows, there the first lessons of citizenship are learned, and the public virtues and affections developed and trained. This has been in past days our strength as a people, and the source of all that is choicest and best in our life. What are the triumphs of the politician if they do not secure room and atmosphere for the free and full growth of those qualities in the boys and girls that fill the street which make for noble manhood and womanhood.

(1) There is serious truth underlying the statement once made by Oliver Wendell Holmes that to produce a good citizen it is necessary to begin back at least one hundred years before he is born. The character of the citizen is affected, not only by what is around him, but by what is behind him. The physical, mental, and moral soundness of the children who will play in the streets of London a hundred years hence is largely at their mercy. The better city will come chiefly from the better children born into it. In the ethics and religion of the present-day, generation is even more important than regeneration. Our science is accumulating a vast body of evidence which goes to show that the flooding of the national brain with alcohol, and the deterioration of tissue and nerve with tobacco are forms of self-indulgence which the present generation is allowing and following in a most immoderate degree, at the cost of immense loss and suffering to the children of the future. The physical basis of the life of the coming citizens of England may well merit our attention, and not so much even for its own sake as for the higher things that depend on it. Health is the basis of character, and our highest thought, imagination, memory, conscience, will, faith, are reached through the fullest and healthiest development of our physical life.

(2) Next to good heredity comes good environment in the training of the citizen, and no environment has such influence as that of the home. Every child has a right to be born into healthy surroundings, and surroundings also that make for refinement. The house is not the home, yet the home in its

right idea is not independent of the house. In a city like London, or Liverpool, or Glasgow, the difficulty is chiefly in the high rents and high taxes, which make it almost impossible for many who want good houses to get them. The root of the terrible overcrowding in our city is selfish and brutal greed, operating through the present system of property in land, which will require soon to be faced as it has never been before. Without possessions man is a barbarian and vagabond upon the earth, yet possessions are his for human and not for selfish uses. The crowding together of so many people in a limited area is detrimental not only to the physical but to the mental and moral life. Some families withstand the degrading influences of ill-conditioned houses and streets, but for many the environment is too powerful. Much of the frightful intemperance of this city is produced by the unwholesome conditions under which people live, and many lesser vices are also due to the same cause. The sights and sounds of a mean tenement house and neighbourhood force nature prematurely in children, and bring forward what ought to be repressed. To have goodness and fineness, and not coarseness and badness, in the lives of the boys and girls in the streets, their eyes and ears require to be fed with good and fine sights and sounds.

(3) The citizen must be educated, educated enough, at least, to perform properly his civic duties. We may expect too much from knowledge and intelligence alone; yet no one requires to be told that a cultivated man of equal merit and energy has a better opportunity of becoming a good citizen than a man who has not enough training to know his own ignorance and vulgarity. We need at the same time to broaden conceptions of education. Those who live in the atmosphere of schools and colleges are apt to form too narrow a conception of what education means, and to imagine that it is co-extensive with their own curriculum. It is often the memory only that is chiefly cultivated, in order to make a show of learning and pass examinations. The supreme purpose of education in school and college is the development of a healthy and vigorous mind, that can think and judge and act for itself wherever it is set to work. For the school, as for the church, nothing is more important than the atmosphere of the home. It is good for boys and girls to live in the atmosphere of healthy and stimulating books.

(4) The training of the powers and aptitudes which lie at the foundation of successful industrial skill ought to have a prominent place in the training of the citizen. The child has a right to an educated head and a trained eye. Proud as we justly are of our schools, yet we are deficient if we do not directly and indirectly prepare our pupils if need be to labour with their hands. The dignity of manual labour is a gospel which requires to be preached to the hungry crowds which besiege in wretched helplessness the doors of all the so-called genteel callings. Educated labour, and not educated persons too fine to labour, is what the community needs more than anything else.

(5) The essential part of the training of the citizen consists in his development along healthy, moral, and religious lines. The supreme end of all training is character, and by character I mean nature disciplined and brought under the sway of moral principles, affections and sentiments. Education alone cannot make good citizens, and what is called head-knowledge has not any necessary bearing on character and conduct. It has to be supplemented by other and more important things. Knowledge is power, but power for evil and for good. "You taught me language," says the monster, Caliban, in *The Tempest*, "and my profit on't is I know how to curse." Education brings its own temptations and shows new and subtler avenues to wickedness, as well as new paths to excellence. Is it not true, that saying of the wisest of modern men: "Everything is pernicious which emancipates the intellect without at the same time strengthening the power of self-control." It is on character the strain of life constantly falls. Character alone is the true protection and safeguard, and in every sphere of activity a man can never achieve much more than his character will allow him. Cleverness, culture, and brilliant gifts are not everything. Every day we see men's work affected by something far deeper. All the higher grades of human service and influence are rooted in character. It lies behind gifts and is the real power in life. To intellectual culture we need to add moral culture, training in self-control, obedience, truthfulness, justice, courtesy, chivalry, unselfishness. The best preparation for the life of city and State is that of the well-ordered family. What we have most to fear for city and State and Church is just the decadence of family

discipline. Greater provision ought to be made in public and private schools for ethical education, an education carried on through direct instruction in the laws and principles of good character and conduct, through discipline and training, through the influence of teachers and the moral tone and atmosphere of the school. Though by popular methods of religious instruction the most solemn things of religion are deprived of much of their force in the education of after life, yet we cannot afford to neglect religious culture in the training of the citizen, even if we have to leave it altogether to the family and the Church. Morality in its highest development and efficiency is only possible under the sanctions and inspirations of religion. We could not bring our boys and girls to love Jesus Christ's type of character and life without making them good citizens, patriotic, public-spirited, with a deep and potent sense of social responsibility and duty. We are living in times of critical strain and trial, and the forces of progress may prove to be destructive forces in the life and character of the children of this generation unless they are trained wisely and patiently to love right and duty, and God above all else. Home life and academic life both suffer grievously from the shutting out of the ideal world, suffer from the neglect or slighting of religion, which best inspires and strengthens character, nourishes wide feeling for others' needs, and supplies the most powerful motives for all forms of social and civic service.

A vote of thanks to Dr. Hunter was moved by MR. GATES and seconded by MRS. SIEVEKING.

SIR ALGERNON COOTE, Bart., in moving a vote of thanks to the Chairman, said he had just come over from Ireland, in a great measure for this purpose, and warmly congratulated the Society on the success of its work and on the continued interest and support of their presidents, Lord and Lady Aberdeen. This vote was seconded by MRS. DEVONSHIRE.

(No special reporter was present, so that we are unable to insert the short speeches).

The conversazione portion of the evening then commenced and the audience apparently welcomed the opportunity of meeting those who were interested in the Union, and of seeing the work sent by the House of Education.

THURSDAY, May 8th, 10.30 a.m.

MRS. HUSBAND occupied the chair, and introduced MRS. ENNIS RICHMOND (Author of *The Mind of a Child, From Boyhood to Manhood, &c.*), who read a paper on

OUR RELATIONS WITH CHILDREN.

There are two dangers which I see before us in the road that we have elected to walk in, in our efforts to attain right education for our children. One is a danger for ourselves, the other a danger for the children. Of late years we have begun to realise that there is a right way and a wrong way of bringing up children. We appeal now to a method, to a system, and every day our effort is so to improve this method, this system, that we, and those to come after us, may have something to turn to, some rules to go upon, when we or they come face to face with the problem of education as exemplified in the particular children in our care. We want to avoid in the future the possibility, or at any rate the probability of children being placed in the care of those who have nothing to turn to for guidance and help in the task set before them.

There have always been educators who preach the gospel that a teacher is no teacher in the best sense of the word unless he has created his own method through his own intelligence and perfected it through his own experience. Those who hitherto have endeavoured to introduce science into the business of educating the young have been strenuously accused of mechanicalising education. And no doubt there is danger of this. There is danger because the education of the young is like no other process; in educating children one can never say that this or that line of action is bound to produce this or that result. In handling a child we are handling something which has a will of its own, and that will is the determining factor of its own future existence—we may, by a false method of education thwart and deform the expression of this will; we may, by a true method of education strengthen, purify and uplift the expression of this will; by no method of education can we do away with